

India Inequality Report 2022: Digital Divide

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In news– Oxfam has published the India Inequality Report 2022: Digital Divide recently.

Key highlights of the report-

- Oxfam India's flagship publication–The India Inequality Report–is produced yearly to bring the attention of the public, policy makers and the government to the ongoing inequality crises in the country.
- The 2022 issue of the inequality report highlights the extent of the digital divide in India and its impact on essential services such as education, health and financial inclusion.
- As per the report, reach of digital technologies remains limited to largely male, urban, upper-caste, and upper-class households and individuals.
- **Eight per cent of the General caste have a computer or a laptop** whereas less than 1 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and 2 per cent of the Scheduled Castes (SC) have it.
- The report revealed a digital divide based on employment status where 95 per cent of the salaried permanent workers have a phone whereas only 50 per cent of the unemployed (willing and looking for a job) have a phone in 2021.
- It has found that **less than 32 per cent of women in India own a mobile phone** – compared to over 60 per cent of men.
- The report says women generally have handsets that cost less and are not as sophisticated as those used by men, and that their usage of digital services is usually limited phone calls and text messages.

- It stated that women use digital services less often and less intensively, and they access the internet less frequently, for fewer reasons.
- Citing Observer Research Foundation data, the Oxfam report said **India accounts for half the world's gendered digital divide given that only a third of all internet users are women.**
- Oxfam said gendered social benchmarks tend to dictate what is 'appropriate' for men and women in this scenario, and that this has led to a relatively lower level of use and assimilation of digital services for women when compared to men.
- In addition, the report also **highlights stark digital inequality based on region, income, caste and education,** after analysing **data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** and the National Sample Survey (NSS).
- According to data presented in the report, there are only 57.29 internet subscribers per 100 people in the country and that number is significantly lower in rural areas than urban.
- **In rural areas internet subscribers per 100 are less than 34.** It is over 101 in urban centres.

What is the Digital Divide?

The growth of digital technology has been accompanied by growing concerns of inequality of access and information to the technology. Therefore, it is important to understand the concept of the digital divide. As defined by the OECD, the digital divide refers to "the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the internet for a wide variety of activities."